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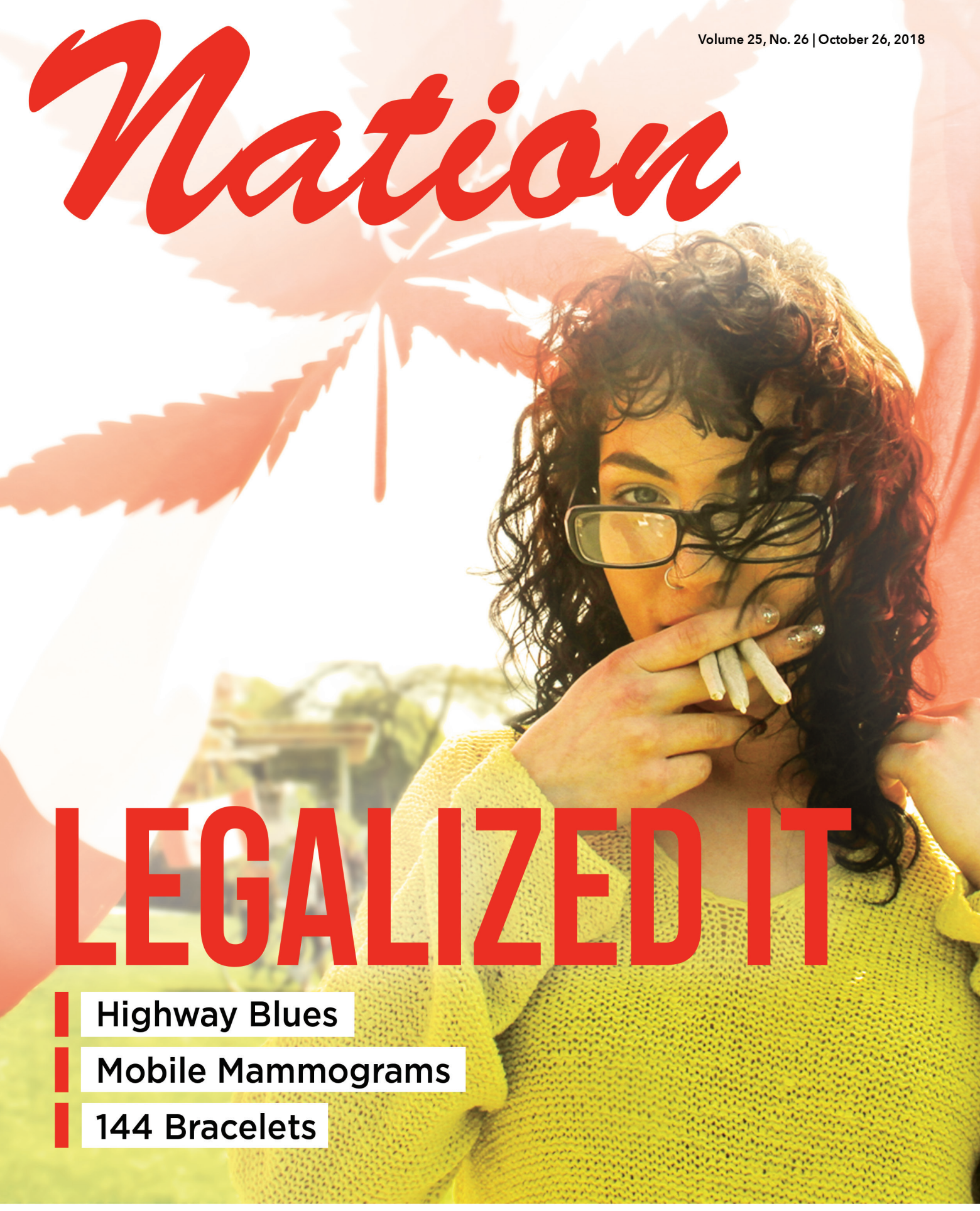
Nation



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Jeremiah Vandermeer

Taking **chances**

by Will Nicholls

Ignore the social media hype that says vaccinations are terrible and get your flu shot

Don't you hate it when you see something on social media that is wrong, but people believe it anyway? When I read something that gives me a twitchy feeling I check it out. There is a danger in blind belief and how it can affect you. Scare tactics that could literally kill you. Take, for example, a post going around about the "dangers" of the flu vaccine. Unfortunately, it's gone viral, as will deadly diseases if too many people buy into this deliberate and dangerous disinformation.

According to the quack theories making the rounds, vaccines are dangerous because thet have mercury and animal blood and/or fluids in them.

Let's look at those "dangers." The mercury-containing compound in some vaccines is called thimerosal. A tiny amount is used as a preservative, and it poses no health threat at all. There's far more mercury in a can of tuna fish than in a shot of flu vaccine.

As for the threat posed by animal blood, let's go back to the late 19th century: microbiologists began to grow bacteria cultures in the laboratory. These early researchers tried to recreate an infected person's tissues by using solutions containing sugars, salts and various meat extracts to make a growth medium. It was successful in growing bacteria and then viruses in the lab, because the media supplied the many necessary nutrients. Viral vaccines such as influenza must be produced in living cells and can require the addition of complex growth media components, such as foetal calf serum.

So, it's just the way things are done. Giving in to the scare tactics can harm you. Health Canada said influenza-related problems put around 12,000 people in the hospital each year and estimate 3,500 people die as a result each year in Canada.

It's also recommended for populations at risk of complications. These people who are more vulnerable include pregnant women, children under five years old, seniors and residents in long-term care or nursing homes. Kids as young as six months old can start getting the vaccine. Those with underlying health problems, such as chronic diseases (asthma, chronic bronchitis, cancer) should get a flu vaccination.

So, ignore the social media hype that says vaccinations are terrible and get your flu shot. It is the best way to reduce your chances of severe flu and of spreading it to others. It's a proven method, tried and true, that has been used for more than 60 years.

In the meantime, here's what you can do to not become a statistic: 1) good hand hygiene practices, such as washing your hands regularly or using an alcohol-based hand rub after contact with the eyes, mouth, nose or secretions; 2) avoid handling soiled tissues or objects used by an ill person; 3) cover coughs and sneezes; and, 4) if you get sick then stay at home, drink lots of liquids and get plenty of rest.

And besides getting a flu shot, fact check what you read on social media. The wrong information could kill you and this is just one example. Don't take chances.

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Integrity at the 144

Grand Chief denounces the SQ's handling of Val-d'Or solidarity bracelets

by Jamie Pashagumskum

A Quebec commission will be reviewing the practice of Sûreté du Québec (SQ) police officers in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region wearing red bands on their uniforms, denounced by many First Nations people as offensive.

The bracelets are symbols of solidarity with the eight officers suspended in 2015 over allegations of abuse of Aboriginal women. They are embossed with the number "144" to denote the station number in Val-d'Or, the SQ detachment where the suspended officers worked.

In an email, Grand Chief Abel Bosum condemned the use of the 144 bracelets and said they would "have negative consequences for the long-term relationship between the SQ and Indigenous people in the region."

Bosum would prefer to see proactive measures intended to reduce conflict and encourage mutual understanding and respect. "These symbolic displays do the opposite and should be denounced. They serve no useful purpose," he said.

The Public Inquiry Commission on Relations Between Indigenous Peoples and Certain Public Services in Quebec is led by former Superior Court Judge Jacques Viens, whose judicial district was Abitibi for over 25 years.

Pressure to form the committee came after no charges were laid against police in the Val-d'Or abuse scandal, which alleged SQ officers subjected Indigenous women to violence, cruel behaviour and had paid for sexual favours with money and cocaine.

The issue was brought to public attention in October 2015 by Radio-Canada's investigative program, Enquête. Their investigation led to the shocking testimonies from Indigenous women. Cindy Ruperthouse's case was later upgraded from a missing person to a homicide. After an investigation led by the Montreal police force, none of the officers in Val-d'Or were criminally charged.

*"The SQ officers displaying the **'144' symbol** only add to the fear that our women must now feel"*

- Grand Chief Abel Bosum

SQ police in Abitibi and around the province began wearing the bracelets soon after the accused officers were suspended.

In September, Captain Paul Charbonneau, interim director of discipline and legal services, told the inquiry that SQ officers would not be ordered to remove the symbols of solidarity.

When contacted, the SQ refused to comment on the 144 bands because the issue is currently under investigation. Neither would a spokesperson reveal internal SQ policies concerning uniforms.

Chapter four of the existing Quebec Police Act titled standards relating to uniforms and equipment states: "Every police officer or special constable must, while performing his or her duties, wear the full uniform and wear or carry all the equipment issued by the employer, without substituting any other element for them."

The Act goes on to explain that authorization for changes to a uniform could only come from the director of the police force. In the occurrence of any offences to the policy, it is the director's responsibility to report it to the department of criminal and penal prosecutions.

Inspector Lyle Cox of the Eeyou Eenou Police Force (EEPF) said their policy specifically states that anything not issued to an officer is not allowed on their uniforms.

Cox said in the past EEPF officers have been asked to remove any items not standard issue such as Canadian flag pins.

"If we see anything out of the ordinary we are required to advise our supervisors," Cox said. "Our policy is direct. It's very standard. It's very clear."

Bosum called the SQ bracelets backward, especially in the era of the #MeToo movement. He said the lack of action by SQ and the use of the bracelets could make Aboriginal women feel ignored and vulnerable.

"In the absence of a single charge against any SQ officer after 37 women came forward with serious allegations, we began to fear greatly for the security of those Indigenous women," Bosum said. "The SQ officers displaying the '144' symbol only add to the fear that our women must now feel. These symbolic displays call into question Quebec's willingness to address systemic racism within its institutions, and calls into question whether Quebec genuinely believes that Indigenous lives matter."

The inquiry into the treatment of Indigenous peoples will hold hearings at the Val-d'Or Music and Drama Conservatory October 15-26. According to the committee, the 144 bracelets will be discussed when the director general, Martin Prud'homme, of the SQ is scheduled to testify in front of the commission October 26.

Bosum called the situation "shameful" and said it throws doubt on the integrity of the entire SQ. He said he will be following the outcome of the inquiry and if necessary his office would work together with other Indigenous leaders in Quebec to address the issue.

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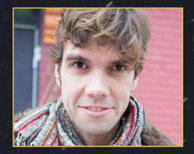

Low voltage

Ouje-Bougoumou demands solutions to power outages

by Patrick Quinn

The people of Ouje-Bougoumou are fed up with repeated power outages and are demanding a permanent solution from Hydro-Québec.

While strong winds and an abundance of trees near power lines have frequently shut down the village's electrical grid over the past several years, three recent episodes have caused Chief Curtis Bosum to lose patience.

"Hydro-Québec has been clearly informed at all levels, from the level of president to maintenance technicians, that the state of the power supply in our community is unacceptable," Chief Bosum wrote earlier this month in a Facebook statement to community members.

"Every time there is any interruption of our service I am alerting all levels of Hydro-Québec and the Cree Nation Government. I will continue to do this until our community secures the level and quality of service that we deserve. We will continue doing everything we can to get an immediate remediation of our power supply."

It seems that these efforts have succeeded in gaining the attention of the provincial electricity utility. Chief Bosum told *the Nation* that a meeting has been set for October 23 with Éric Filion, President of Hydro-Québec Distribution.

"As of today, there is a meeting to have this problem solved once and for all," said Bosum. "That's what I'm expecting out of this meeting."

Power outages have been a recurring problem in Ouje-Bougoumou since the community was built in the 1990s after decades of forced relocations. Strong winter winds coming off Lake Opemisca are the usual culprit, including one incident that knocked out power for close to 72 hours.

"We're very vulnerable with these high winds," commented Deputy Chief Lance Cooper. "A tree falls over and we're done. One time this happened during Christmas."

After Chief Bosum reached out to Hydro-Québec last year, they investigated the situation and eventually cut treetops in areas deemed problematic. Despite assurances that there shouldn't be any more problems, another outage struck early this fall.

Bosum said that although Hydro-Québec responded quite quickly, they didn't resolve his concerns that other areas on the power line required intervention or were likely to result in the same issues. Sure enough, the next outage impacted an audience that couldn't be ignored.

On September 17, the Montreal Symphony Orchestra made a special visit to Ouje-Bougoumou during its historic tour of northern Indigenous communities, presenting the Cree opera *Chaakapesh* in the only Cree community of the tour. It was on this day that a huge storm blacked out the region.

Fortunately, the show was able to go on with the help of a hardworking team, a generator and battery-powered lights. Video footage of the concert shows the orchestra's sheet music illuminated by hanging flashlights, while the audience sat in darkness.

"Ironically, they were fully sponsored by Hydro-Québec, so they got on the phone with the president who said they would make it a priority," Bosum explained. "But the power didn't go on until later that evening. We were still able to pull off the show; they didn't need much power, just some lighting. The show was a success but it's quite embarrassing, hosting this kind of event, knowing there are people from other communities attending. It was pitch black."

After this fall's second outage, Bosum insisted that a meeting with Hydro-Québec was necessary to find a permanent solution. Five minutes after getting an email from a regional representative, he received a text from the fire department. The power was out again.

"There have been more outages than usual this fall," confirmed Cendrix Bouchard, spokesperson for Hydro-Québec. "Lots of severe weather. It's always due to vegetation coming into contact with the network."

Bouchard said there have actually been six outages this autumn already but called back to clarify that some of these problems were provincewide. The line causing most problems is along Route 113 where 350 trees were cut down by Hydro-Québec in 2016.

"A tree falls over and we're done. One time this happened during ***Christmas****"*

- Lance Cooper, Deputy Chief

To reduce delays in power restoration following outages, a second team was added to the area last year. Previously, crews had to be sent from Lac Saint-Jean. Another recent initiative intended to minimize delays is the addition of smart meters, which communicate outages to Hydro-Québec as soon as they occur.

"We are taking this very seriously and the meeting next week between Mr. Filion and the Chief of the community is actual proof of that," stated Bouchard.

He added that other rural communities in forested areas face similar issues, with the problems and responses depending on where the power lines are, the type of trees, and previous work done in each area. Hydro-Québec seeks to minimize tree removal while keeping them clear of the lines.

Although comparable details in Quebec were unavailable, the Vancouver Sun reported a few years ago that British Columbia's remote northern areas average 20 to 30 hours without power annually compared to one hour in large urban centres.

Dense urban areas have so many grid connections that electricity can often be redirected around a fault in one line almost seamlessly while a failure in more remote areas with only one transmission line can black out a whole community indefinitely.

"To find a solution so my community doesn't have to face any more power outages, I've heard of options – maybe putting the line underground," Chief Bosum said. "The other one that we've been requesting is to enlarge the corridor they have from the tree line to the power line."

In hurricane-ravaged Florida, where improving the resilience of the electrical grid is a key concern, moving power lines underground is a popular but pricey potential solution. Other alternatives include replacing wooden poles with concrete or steel ones and reinforcing utility poles with tensioned cables for greater stability.

"I know there are some scenarios that will be presented at the meeting," Bouchard remarked. "Usually putting lines underground is very costly."

Chief Bosum is hopeful that the meeting with Filion will yield a sustainable solution for reliable power in Ouje-Bougoumou and answer his other questions. Months ago he requested reports about brownouts in the community, voltage reductions that result in a dimming of electric quality.

"Since I've put a word in and been on top of them, Ouje has sort of been a priority because I have used higher cards to address the issue," Bosum confided. "I've got their attention, that's for sure."

First Nations Market Housing Fund

NOTICE OF OPPORTUNITY – TRUSTEE APPOINTMENTS

What is the First Nations Market Housing Fund?

The Fund became operational in 2008 to give First Nations people living on reserve a better chance to become home owners. It was developed to facilitate and broaden the range of housing options for residents of First Nations communities.

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To learn more, visit cmhc.ca/fnmhf

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Grand Chief Dr. Bosum is being recognized for his significant contributions to the Cree Nation.

The Order of Canada acknowledges outstanding achievements, dedication to the community, and service to the Nation.

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And the nominees are…

The Cree Native Arts & Crafts Association has announced its nominees for the third annual Eeyou Istchee Achievement Awards. The event takes place at the Nemaska Sports Complex on October 24.

BUCKLEY PETAWABANO AWARD

- Maloose Jolly, Mistissini
- Emma Saganash, Waswanipi
- Luke Macleod, Mistissini
- Nick Wapachee, Nemaska
- Willy Bosum, Ouje-Bougoumou

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

- Kenneth Cheezo, Eastmain
- Luke Macleod, Mistissini
- Daisy Moar, Waskaganish
- Yvon Neeposh, Nemaska

RISING STAR AWARD

- Kelly Cooper, Ouje-Bougoumou
- Joshua Salt, Ouje-Bougoumou
- North Stars, Nemaska
- Francine Weistche, Waskaganish
- Flora Weistche, Waskaganish

SELF INNOVATOR AWARD

- Jossee Bernier, Ouje-Bougoumou
- Kelly Cooper, Ouje-Bougoumou
- Duane Shanush, Eastmain
- Pakesso Mukash, Whapmagoostui
- Sidney Weapanicappo, Eastmain

BEST FIDDLER AWARD

- Byron Jonah, Waskaganish
- Anthony House, Chisasibi
- Roger Weapenicappo, Eastmain

In Brief

Standing Rock vote blocked

In a battleground state for control of the US Senate in next month's midterm elections, a law blocking Native American voters in North Dakota was reaffirmed by a conservative-leaning Supreme Court. Passed by a 6-2 margin, the law states that only people with street addresses be allowed to vote. However, many who live on reservations only have post office boxes. North Dakota is the only state without a voter registry.

While Republicans say the law protects against voter fraud, Democrats argue that, in a state divided by the Standing Rock protests in 2016, the move threatens to oust Democratic senator Heidi Heitkamp, who won her 2013 election by the slimmest of margins.

Indigenous activists plan to meet the Supreme Court's decision with action. According to the Washington Post, tribal officials will be at polling stations on election day confirming tribal members by using a database. From there they'll create street addresses for those who need them in order to vote.

out in the OPEN

High spirits abound despite the waits to be first buyers of legal cannabis in Montreal

Photos & Story by Dan Isaac

Sprawling lineups were a fixture at the few operational Société québécoise du cannabis (SQDC) storefronts on the first day of legal, Canada-wide cannabis sales. In Quebec, 11 shops opened their doors to customers, three located in Montreal.

And it wasn't only consumers who flocked to the government-run weed stores – major media outlets like NBC were on hand to witness the spectacle. Even Mexico's TV Azteca made an appearance.

Some of the patrons reported waiting as long as five hours to get their hands on the first batches of government-sanctioned pot.

When asked if he'd wait five hours for a beer, a customer who would only identify himself as Frank the Tank responded, "No, but I think I deserve one."

As *the Nation* paced the lines on St. Hubert and St. Catherine streets informing customers of the long wait times, most were resolute in making their purchase. Some, not so much.

When asked if he'd wait five hours for a beer, a customer who would only identify himself as Frank the Tank responded, ***"No, but I think I deserve one."***

Another anonymous source said that they hadn't heard of anyone "sparking up in public" up north, but that the SQDC prices would make it difficult for local dealers to **stay competitive.**

"Five hours," exclaimed a man who preferred to stay anonymous. "I'm just going to call my dealer, and try again tomorrow."

Another customer at the back of line named Pat said that he'd wait it out, so long as it didn't snow.

And while it was mostly smiles down south, it'll be three to five days before SQDC products make their debut in Eeyou Istchee.

One "happy toker" from Eeyou Istchee said that although a lot of the premium products were sold out by the time they accessed the SQDC's online store, their order had been received and they were patiently waiting for their shipment from Canada Post.

Another anonymous source said that they hadn't heard of anyone "sparking up in public" up north, but that the SQDC prices would make it difficult for local dealers to stay competitive.

There are three varieties of cannabis available online and in stores with varying effects: Indica, Sativa and hybrids. Edibles and CBD products won't be available until at least the spring of 2019.

Indica strains are believed to be physically sedating. On the other hand, Sativa plants are seen to be more invigorating, uplifting cerebral effects that pair well with physical activity, social gatherings and creative projects. Hybrids combine both and depend on what genetic traits they receive from the parent plant.

In other words, Indica breeds help ease pain, and to relax. Sativas are good for making art, dancing or conversation. Hybrids are a mix of the two.

There are still legal risks to avoid. The Eeyou Enou Police Department published an extensive list in force now that the Cannabis Regulation Act is in effect.

Growing a plant will set you back $250-$750 for a first-time offence. Repeat offenders could face up to a $1,500 fine. Purchasing cannabis for a minor, also still illegal, is punishable with a fine of up to $3,000. Driving while high gets a fine of $1000 and a license suspension for a year for a first-time offense.

Smugglers and dealers for repeat offenses can face fines of up to $1 million. People working under the influence can receive a fine, while repeat offenders might pay up to $4,500. Like cigarettes, smoking within a nine-metre radius of a prohibited place can also net a fine of $500 to $3000, depending on whether or not it's a first-time offense.

Staying Cancer Free

***What to do** for Breast Cancer Awareness Month*

by Amy German

Every October, out come the pink ribbons as marches and fund-raisers are organized to help fight women's cancers.

In Eeyou Istchee, breast -ancer screenings for women between the ages of 50-69 are handled in a unique way – every two years a screening team visits all nine communities in an initiative coordinated by the Cree Health Board and Social Services of James Bay (CBHSSJB).

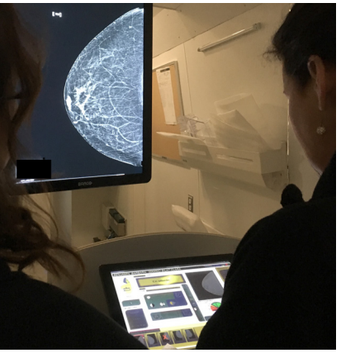
These screenings are handled by a special team, that includes Irene Chu (a nurse counsellor for Chronic Diseases Management), Lucy Trapper (a program planning research officer for Chronic Diseases Management) and Maggie Odell (medical advisor for Public Health).

According to Irene Chu, the Institute of Public Health of Quebec developed the Clara Bus, a mammogram machine transported by bus, and Sophie Air, a plane that brings a mammogram machine to remote clinics, so that Cree don't have to leave the territory for a screening every two years.

"Those who miss the being screened with the Clara Bus and Sophie Air are encouraged to visit their local CMC and to

The Institute of Public Health of Quebec developed the **Clara Bus**, a mammogram machine transported by bus, and **Sophie Air**, a plane that brings a mammogram machine to remote clinics

Photos provided by the CHB



Cree Health Board's official logo for breast cancer screening

There is also a risk of **over-diagnosis** which is when a woman receives a diagnosis for cancer that might never have had an effect on her health

arrange a screening at the Chibougamau Hospital or Val-d'Or Hospital," said Chu.

The Chishaayiyuu Department oversees the whole process and works closely with the radiology department and the local CMC and CHB's Wiichihiituwin Department for transport arrangements.

The rate of breast cancer among Crees is no higher than that of the general population. The screening rate hovers around 70%, which is about what the CHBSSJB aims for. Chu pointed out that one of the problems they face with the Clara Bus is that it only stays in a community for two days every two years. Women who are unavailable or out of town at the time have to travel to hospitals either in Val-d'Or or Chibougamau.

There are other issues with the screening process, Chu said.

"The reality is that there is a high false positive rate," she noted. "Some women could have an abnormal result from having a mammogram screening and could be asked to undergo additional investigative examinations by the radiologist. Often it is not breast cancer. This can cause over-testing and high anxiety levels."

There is also a risk of over-diagnosis, which is when a woman receives a diagnosis for cancer that might never have had an effect on her health, like a cancer that develops very slowly or is a benign lump.

For those who have a history of female cancers in their families, who have relatives have died of breast, ovarian or cervical cancer, genetic testing for BCRA-1 and BCRA-2 is available but is reserved for extreme cases.

"We do not routinely recommend genetic testing for all women. We encourage women who have a sister, mother or aunt with cancer to visit their physician to discuss if genetic testing would be advised," explained Chu.

"The answer will generally depend on the age of diagnosis, and how many family members were affected."

Chu added that if cancer has been quite frequent among a patient's female family members, testing would be warranted and would be followed up at the McGill University Health Centre.

"The reality is that there is a ***high false positive rate"***

- Irene Chu, nurse counsellor

JAMES BAY HIGHWAY BLUES

Manuan Lafond caught the blues on the JBH and wrote a song about it – in Cree

by Joshua Grant | Photo by Paul Paccini

Manuan Lafond is quite familiar with the bump and grind of the James Bay Highway. He's dodged plenty of potholes and made countless trips from his current home in Gatineau back to the Cree Nation. Now that he's studying at Algonquin College he makes frequent trips back to his home community of Chisasibi and elsewhere in Eeyou Istchee, sometimes to visit family and sometimes to get other Indigenous musicians to live shows and music festivals up north.

The treacherous highway familiar to many Eeyouch inspired Lafond to write his own Cree blues song, a stark contrast to his previous musical work as a rapper. He and up-and-coming filmmaker Paul Paccini travelled over 3000 kms to shoot a music video for his ode to Chisasibi – a track called *James Bay Highway Blues*.

"This is my third music video," he told *the Nation*, "but the other ones I didn't promote as well as I did this one. Now that I'm taking Music Industry Arts [at Algonquin College], I'm more aware of how to promote and market my music."

"It all started when I was finishing up school as a returning student," Lafond said. "I went to Walmart and bought a CD – Stevie Ray Vaughan's *Greatest Hits*. I actually bought it for a friend but I ended up opening it. I didn't have any satellite radio or anything, so I listened to that CD the whole way home [from Chisasibi to Gatineau].

"Somewhere in the middle of the road, I stopped the car and started singing. Stevie was doing the guitar solos and I was trying to sing, to mimic his style – Texas blues. And then I came up with my own lyrics and that's when I got the idea to sing about the Chisasibi road in a blues style."

The journey documented in the music video is more than a way of raising awareness to the poor condition of the highway, or cracking a joke at Quebec's lack of proper road maintenance up north. Days before the video was filmed, Lafond lost his mother, Pamela House, after her battle with cancer.

"She always was singing around the house," Lafond reminisced. "She always loved to sing. I was rapping, in the basement, working construction for five years and doing odd jobs here and there [before going back to school].

"Sometimes she would ask, 'How come you don't sing?' and I would say, 'I'm a rapper, I don't sing.'

"It would be so great if she could hear the song herself. I know in spirit she knows I'm doing what I love to do and that's singing now. I'm not sure if she thought I would actually come this far [with my music career], but now I'm making things happen and I'm investing in myself."

Funded by a grant from the Cree Nation of Chisasibi, the video for *James Bay Highway Blues* is available on iTunes and YouTube. Sung mostly in Cree, the song is a blend of blues with hints of hip hop that Lafond says is its own Cree style of music. He wants to make Native music for Native people, Cree people most of all.

"This song is dedicated to Chisasibi, first and foremost," Lafond explained. "Everyone talks about this road, how long and shitty it is, full of potholes. I had to find something that described that.

"The James Bay Highway is something that I knew people would relate to and it took me a year to write it. It took me about a month to find the right melody and the lyrics kept on changing. I had to make sure it was good, and it turned out. You feel the blues in there."

As he continues his program at Algonquin, networks with other Indigenous artists and make music, Lafond is making progress towards achieving his dream of making a living as a musician. He is also collaborating with other Eeyouch who have already embarked on the long road to musical success. He signed with an independent record label in Ottawa called PaulStar Entertainment that is owned and operated by Paul Napash of Chisasibi – who also studied Music Industry Arts at Algonquin.

"I've been kind of following in his footsteps," said Lafond. "He's awesome, he's a producer and engineer and I'm his artist. I get recording time at his studio, at his own place."

Lafond is also good friends with artist manager Steve Einish, who works with Violent Ground, a hip-hop duo out of Kawawachikamach, in the Naskapi Nation. He was also responsible for introducing Lafond to Paul Paccini who shot the *James Bay Highway Blues* video.

Lafond hopes to continue the spirit of Indigenous musical collaboration within the Cree Nation by travelling to music festivals and performing at events throughout Eeyou Istchee – perhaps at one point even sharing the stage with a certain band from his hometown.

"I would love to play this song with the famous Fort George Rockers, with a full band," he exclaimed. "Dale [House], he's my Mom's first cousin. I would love to perform *James Bay Highway Blues* with the Fort George Rockers, that would be great!"

As far as musical and monetary success goes, Lafond isn't too worried about immediate recognition or a quick paycheque, he's in it for the long haul.

"It's all about dedication and discipline," he said. "It's not about getting paid right away, it's about making music and getting gigs for now. I'm making Indigenous music, and that's my focus."

"It's all about ***dedication and discipline.*** *It's not about getting paid right away"*

Everyone talks about this road, how long and shitty it is, full of potholes. ***I had to find something that described that.***

Rescuing Cree

MoCreebec launches Cree-language classes

by Darya Marchenkova

Photo by Michael Jolly

When Alyssa Gunner traveled from Moose Factory to Chisasibi this summer for a youth gathering, she said she felt "out of place" because she could not communicate in Cree.

Gunner was one of seven MoCreebec youth who went to the meeting in Chisasibi, which aimed to teach youth from across Eeyou Istchee about the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. But the Moose Factory delegates only spoke English. Over the course of the four-day gathering, participants helped translate the event from Cree to English so that MoCreebec youth could understand.

When the gathering was over, Gunner stood up in front of the group and thanked everyone for the time and patience it had taken to translate. Then she pledged to do all she could to bring Cree-language classes to MoCreebec.

"Next time we all come together again for anything like this, I hope that we're able to speak Cree, or at least understand it," said Gunner, who is MoCreebec's youth program coordinator.

"It really touched the hearts of the Cree teachers who were there," said MoCreebec Chief Allan Jolly.

Once my generation dies off, if we don't do something about it, we're going to have ***lost our language***

- Allan Jolly, MoCreebec Chief

Three months later, MoCreebec held its first Cree language workshop in Moose Factory.

More than 30 community members of all ages attended a weekend of language classes in September. Theresa Kakabat-Georgekish and Jeremiah Mishtaachiishikw, two Cree-language teachers, traveled to Moose Factory from Wemindji to lead the sessions. Participants ranged from 12 to 60 years old. Some had never spoken Cree before; others could speak but not read it.

"The enthusiasm was there, it's obvious," said Chief Jolly, who speaks Cree but hopes to learn syllabics through the classes.

The September classes were only a starting point: for the next four months, Kakabat-Georgekish will lead weekly classes for the MoCreebec community over video conference call. Seven students started the virtual classes on October 11. They originally planned to meet every two weeks, but quickly decided to meet weekly instead once it sunk in how much work it takes to learn a language, Gunner said.

The workshops are a remedy for a community at "high risk" of losing the Cree language all together, Jolly said.

A 1987 survey conducted among MoCreebec members showed that 21% of people under 40 considered Cree their primary language compared to 73% of respondents over 40. Only 1% of survey respondents under 40 said they exclusively spoke Cree at home.

Chief Jolly, who is 68, grew up speaking Cree but did not pass the language on to his children.

"Once my generation dies off, if we don't do something about it, we're going to have lost our language," Jolly said.

MoCreebec's location on the western coast of James Bay has made it harder for the community to keep the Cree language alive, Jolly said.

Decisions by the federal government led Cree people to come from the eastern to the western coast of James Bay, he said. That included establishing residential schools and a federal hospital that serviced Cree people from both sides of the bay. "We became a displaced people," Jolly said.

Jolly was born and raised in Waskaganish, but went to residential school in Moose Factory at the age of nine. "All of the kids who were in the residential school in Moose Factory were from the Quebec Cree communities," he said.

The Cree Nation recognized MoCreebec as the 11th Cree community in November 2017. Jolly hopes that recognition will serve as a "starting block" for the community's linguistic and cultural revival.

"We're not as immersed in cultural activities that are happening in the Cree communities because we've become kind of disconnected from our own cultural roots," said Jolly. "But we're trying to bring that back."

We're not as immersed in cultural activities that are happening in the Cree communities because we've become kind of disconnected from ***our own cultural roots***

- Allan Jolly, MoCreebec Chief

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We would like to thank the Ouwah Store of Chisasibi for it's generous donation of two boxes of sweaters to the Native Woman's Shelter of Montreal. We invite others to donate to this worthy cause.

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Tea AND Bannock

Being honest about depression

by Maïtée Labrecque-Saganash

I was watching *Tout le monde en parle* recently. Hubert Lenoir, a 24-year-old singer and songwriter, was being interviewed on the hugely popular Radio-Canada program about the success of his recent album *Darlène*. Lenoir is an eccentric artist who does not fit in the Western mould of what a man should look like. He opened up about his struggles to cope with insults and his new life as a national celebrity, and said that recently, he feels like setting himself on fire. For me, such honesty about one's mental health is an act of bravery but I was disgusted by the lack of empathy and response he received from the hosts. In this province, we still cannot address suicide honestly without being shamed. As someone who attempted in the past, that hits home.

I remember when I was in that state. I remember how insulted and alone I felt when I was told I needed to wait months to see clinicians. I feel like the resources we give to youth in crisis are not empowering at all. I was told to call suicide hotlines when the last thing I needed was to talk to a stranger who I feared might call the cops on me. I was told that people are there for me when in reality I was alone to the point I could not leave my apartment. None of my friends visited me. When you're not even able to leave your flat, you can't really get services in the city.

Depression is ugly. I do understand that treatment has to be done a certain way but if you are going to promise support, you have to deliver and quickly. It's the same thing with gatherings on suicide prevention. We open up, get hugs and we're being told that people will be there for us and we don't hear from most of them ever again.

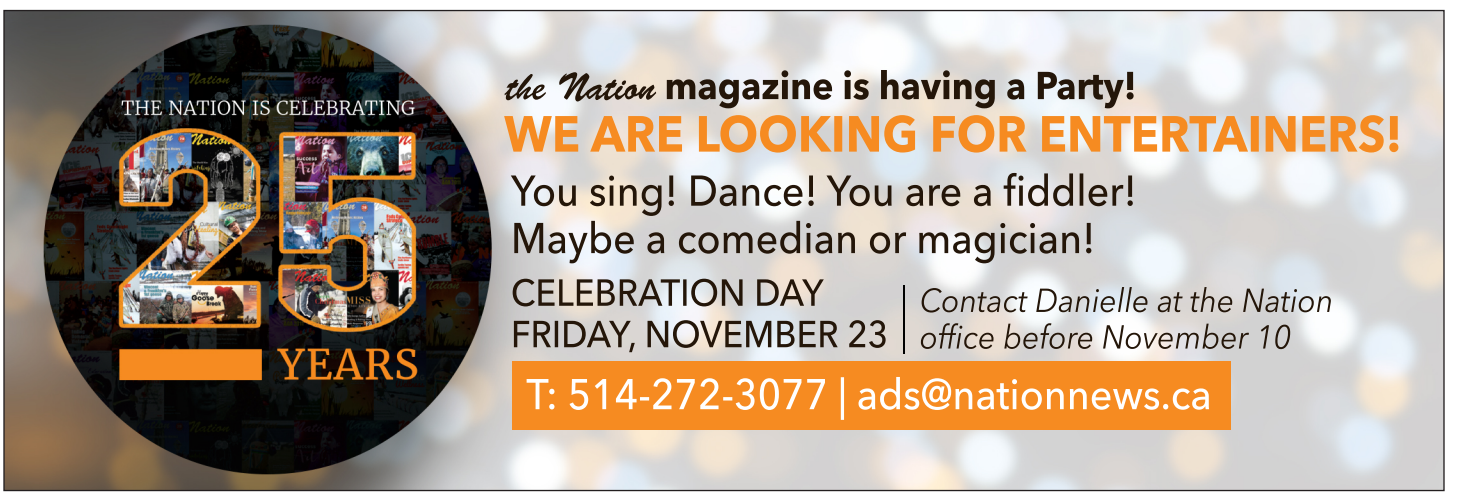
There is a lack of resources for men also. Men are expected to "man up" when things go wrong and rarely get proper spaces to show vulnerability. Such toxic masculinity discourages men in our communities from seeking help and causes damage to our collective wellbeing.

The circle is very symbolic for Indigenous peoples when it comes to health, environment and community structure. But the only circle we need to break is the cycle of suffering. A single individual's poor mental health can have an impact on a whole community, so it is our collective responsibility to support everyone. Some will need land-based programs, some will need Elders and some will need more Western-style services, while others will find peace in spirituality or religion. We need to provide all of them.

No one is born knowing how to handle crisis. It's something we learn. A lot of parents want to help their child but don't know how. Residential schools had a negative impact on our communities not only because they took language and culture away from our parents but also because they never taught them proper communication skills. We need to give communication tools to our community members so they know how to express themselves when something bad happens.

We are starting to have a decent conversation on suicide and mental health. I know a lot of community members have creative ideas for initiatives based on their personal experiences. Those initiatives need to be supported and the conversation has to keep going outside suicide prevention gatherings or suicide prevention week.

That segment on *Tout le monde en parle* really irritated me. No one experiencing suicidal ideations deserves what Dany Turcotte said. "You don't say things like that." To anyone struggling right now: yes, you can say things like that. Your feelings are valid and you deserve a place to safely express them.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